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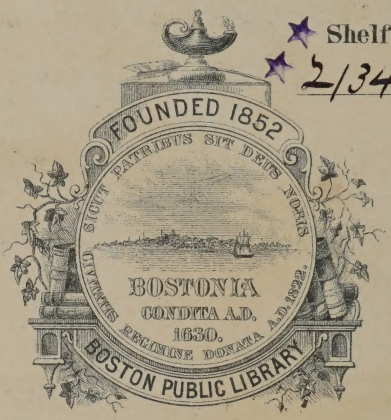

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City Document.—*No.* 10.

CITY OF BOSTON.

MESSAGE OF THE MAYOR

ON THE SUBJECT OF A

PUBLIC LIBRARY.

In Common Council, February 19, 1852.

Read and referred to the Committee on the Public Library, and ordered to be printed.

Sent up for concurrence.

HENRY J. GARDNER, *President.*

In Board of Mayor and Aldermen,
February 23, 1852.

Read and concurred.

BENJ. SEAVER, *Mayor.*

CITY HALL, *Feb.* 19*th*, 1852.

HENRY J. GARDNER, ESQ.,

President of the Common Council.

SIR:—I deem it expedient, at this early period in the year, to call the attention of the City Council to the present condition of the Public Library. It is now about four years since the Legislature of the Commonwealth passed an Act authorizing the City of Boston to establish and maintain a Public Library, for the use of its inhabitants. Pursuant to this Act, the City Council established a Free Public Library, and appointed a Committee to see to its interests. On their recommendation, a small room on the third floor of the City Hall was appropriated to its use; and, although the number of books thus far received,—most of them presented by a few of our distinguished citizens,—does not exceed four thousand volumes, more ample accommodations are already needed, in order to place the books in a condition for use. It can hardly be expected that our citizens will feel disposed to make liberal donations to the Library before at least suitable rooms for the reception and safe keeping of books are provided. The City Council, under whose care and control the Library is placed by law, has not yet adopted any efficient measures for procuring a supply of good books on all subjects connected with the practical affairs of life and the general culture of the people. There should be, it seems to me, no unnecessary delay in placing the Library on such a foundation as will entitle it to, and

secure for it, the fullest confidence of the community in its success and usefulness. Boston ought not long to be far behind her sister City of New York, in the establishment of a Public Library; and, while we can scarcely hope to rival her princely Astor, it cannot be doubted that we have many citizens who would be ready to bestow upon it large sums in money and in books, if they can be *fully* satisfied of its *permanent* foundation and *ultimate success.*

A Free Public Library may justly be regarded as necessary to the completion of that noble system of Public Instruction, which reflects so much honor upon our City, and does so much to promote its prosperity. This view of a Public Library is so happily presented in the Hon. Edward Everett's letter to my predecessor, that I am sure all will be highly pleased to see the idea expressed in his own language.

"The first principles of popular government require that the means of education should, as far as possible, be equally within the reach of the whole population. This can be effected in no other way than by a system of Education supported by the public. The same great motive of public policy requires that the Schools should be of a very superior order, so that every child may receive not merely an education, but an excellent education;—as good as could be got at the best and most expensive private Schools.

"This, however, is the case only up to the age when School education is at an end. We provide our children with the elements of learning and science, and put it in their power, by independent study and research, to make further acquisitions of useful knowledge from books; but where are they to find the books in which it is contained? Here the noble principle of equality

sadly fails. The sons of the wealthy alone have access to well-stored libraries; while those whose means do not allow them to purchase books are too often debarred from them at the moment when they would be most useful. We give them an elementary education, impart to them a taste, and inspire them with an earnest desire for further attainments,—which unite in making books a necessary of intellectual life,—and then make no provision for supplying them.

"Where is the young engineer, machinist, architect, chemist, engraver, painter, or student in any of the professions or of any of the exact sciences, or of any branch of natural history, or of moral or intellectual philosophy,—to get access to the books which are absolutely necessary to enable him to pursue his inquiries to any advantage?

"Nothing is left to young men who cannot afford to buy books but to borrow them of individuals,—a very precarious and inadequate dependence, and one of which but very few can take advantage."

It would be difficult to overstate the advantages which a Free Library, well-stored with good books, must afford to the inhabitants of Boston, especially to the young, whose characters and tastes are growing into those permanent forms which will be likely to affect their condition through life.

In order to carry this Institution into successful operation, I respectfully suggest that a Librarian be appointed, and a large room or rooms easy of access in a central portion of the City be secured, as the one now occupied has always been regarded more as a place for the deposit of books, than as a suitable situation for a permanent Library. I would also respectfully suggest for your consideration the propriety of appointing, from

our citizens at large, five or six gentlemen who feel interested in the subject, who, together with the Joint Standing Committee, shall form a Board of Directors or Trustees for the Public Library. These gentlemen, being annually elected by the City Government to act with the Committee on the Library in the management of its affairs, would, I think, essentially aid in giving permanence to the Institution, and in securing the confidence and co-operation of our citizens.

The recommendations I have ventured to make will involve a small expenditure only, and will, I believe, bring to the Library many times the amount required to carry them out. With these views, I submit the subject to your wisdom, with entire confidence that some effectual measure will be adopted.

BENJAMIN SEAVER, *Mayor.*